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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIRUT 001049

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR NEA/FO, NEA/ELA, PM/FO
ALSO FOR IO A/S SILVERBERG AND PDAS WARLICK
P FOR HERRO MUSTAFA
USUN FOR KHALILZAD/WOLFF/KUMAR/PHEE
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TAGS: [PREL](#) [PGOV](#) [PTER](#) [PINR](#) [UNSC](#) [MARR](#) [MOPS](#) [SY](#) [LE](#)

SUBJECT: LEBANON: PRESIDENT SLEIMAN INTENDS TO GO TO SYRIA
WITHIN A WEEK

REF: A. (A) PARIS 1358

[1](#)B. (B) STATE 76649

Classified By: Charge d'Affaires a.i. William Grant for reasons 1.4 (b)
and (d).

[1](#)1. (C) Lebanese President Michel Sleiman plans to visit Damascus as soon as a week following Syrian FM Walid Moallem's July 21 visit to Lebanon, and hopes to move forward quickly in establishing diplomatic relations between the two countries. Sleiman expressed his satisfaction with the new cabinet, and downplayed remarks he had made to the press about the possibility of military action to liberate Sheba'a Farms. On the U.S. decision to send U/S Burns to attend the P5 1 meeting with an Iranian representative, Sleiman said he shared U.S. concerns about Iranian nuclear activities, stressing that Lebanon opposes the use of nuclear energy for military purposes. End summary.

SATISFIED WITH CABINET

[1](#)2. (C) CDA Grant, accompanied by Pol/Econ Chief, met with President Sleiman at his office in Baabda Palace on July 18. Sleiman welcomed the USG's congratulations on cabinet formation and the Secretary's letter thanking him for her June 16 visit to Lebanon. He said he looked forward to his upcoming visit to the United States, where he planned to travel to both New York (for the UN General Assembly) and Washington.

[1](#)3. (C) Sleiman expressed satisfaction with the new cabinet, noting that all of Lebanon's political factions were represented. He was pleased with his own ministers, (Defense Minister Elias Murr, Interior Minister Ziyad Baroud, and Minister of State Youssef Taqla), whom he called "good men." Commenting that it was not a very democratic way to form a cabinet, he said that in Lebanon there are "always special ways of doing things."

SHARED CONCERNS ABOUT
IRANIAN NUCLEAR ACTIVITY

[1](#)4. (C) Using the points in ref B, CDA Grant explained the U.S. decision to participate at the Political Director level at the July 19 meeting in Geneva between the P-5 1 and Iranian negotiator Saeed Jalili, stressing that the U.S. maintained its concerns about Iran's nuclear intentions.

15. (C) Sleiman was grateful for the information and said Lebanon opposed the use of nuclear activities for military purposes. He noted that, like the deposed Shah, Iran's leaders had ambitions to turn the country into a strong regional player, hence its aggressiveness on the nuclear issue. Improvements in the Syria-Israel relationship could help diminish Iran's influence, he suggested.

PURSuing LEBANESE-
SYRIAN RAPPROCHEMENT

16. (C) Sleiman confirmed Syrian FM Walid Moallem's July 21 visit to Lebanon to deliver an official invitation for him to visit President Asad in Damascus. "I will go," Sleiman said, "maybe within a week," explaining that in his view Lebanon should act rapidly to formalize improvements in its relationship with Syria. He said he would do his best to move forward on the exchange of embassies between the two countries, but hoped that at a minimum there would be a declaration of intent to do so.

17. (C) Commenting on his recent bilateral meeting with Asad in Paris, on the margins of the summit of the Mediterranean Union (ref A), Sleiman claimed Asad has "good intentions" of improving Syria's position in the world and vis-a-vis Lebanon. Sleiman said he told Asad frankly during the larger meeting that it was in Asad's interests to demonstrate good behavior to the western world, which expects him to change his positions.

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18. (C) Responding to the Charge, Sleiman said he did not discuss the Special Tribunal for Lebanon with Asad, although he knew what his views were. The Syrians are not against the Tribunal, he explained, but do not want it to interfere in the internal Syrian political situation. "We will need to wait and see the evidence," he said.

NO INTENTION OF USING
MILITARY OPTION ON SHEBA'A

19. (C) Asked to explain his recent remarks that Lebanon would use force if necessary to achieve Israeli withdrawal from Sheba'a Farms, Sleiman said it was not his intention to use military means. Rather, he had given the standard answer regarding what options existed should diplomacy fail.

COMMENT

110. (C) Sleiman continues to walk a very tight rope between Lebanon's pro-western and anti-western allies. As his recent remarks during the welcome home ceremony for Lebanese prisoners from Israel and his apparent willingness to engage Syria demonstrate, he is being careful not to antagonize those who wield considerable influence in Lebanon, while at the same time saying the right things to quell concerns on the part of his western supporters.

111. (C) Some in Lebanon criticize Sleiman for going too far in accepting Syria's overtures. We view Sleiman's response to Syria as expected and consistent with the role he has been defining for himself as a uniter and president for all of Lebanon. We have heard talk that Syria is not really interested in moving quickly on opening embassies; Sleiman's answer that the two sides may announce only an intent to do so seems consistent with that. How Sleiman actually deals with Lebanon's would-be diplomatic neighbor and the issue of Hizballah arms will give us a better indication of where he is going. End comment.

GRANT